

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society



Fraser South Rhododendron Society
is a chapter of the
American Rhododendron Society

Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the
third Wednesday of each month at:
United Church Hall
5673 - 200th Street
Langley BC

www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth

2004 Officers

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This Month's Meeting: Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Speaker: Terry Maczuga
of Cloud Mountain Farm

Topic: Dwarf Conifers

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show & Tell: Vern Finley

Plant Sale: Harold Fearing

Quick Hits



Welcome! to our newest
members:

Jean Cowley, of Surrey
Dave Shantz, of Mission



Embarrassment

Last month I included a copy of the current membership list with the hard copy issues which were mailed out. Thankfully I neglected to include the membership list as a separate attachment to those who receive The Yak via e-mail, since in my panic to ensure that the February issue was sent out in a timely manner, I scooped up an obsolete iteration of the ever-changing membership list. As I mentioned at the February meeting, the membership listing attached to back of the February issue should simply be removed and destroyed. I have attached a corrected and updated listing - including a few members who had not yet submitted their renewal requests - to the back of this issue. The membership list is not posted on the website, but those who receive The Yak by e-mail will receive a copy as a separate attachment in their e-mail.



IN THE BEGINNING

My pilgrimage with the genus rhododendron began with Unique, a gift for Judy for Mother's Day two weeks after Keely was born. Previously I knew nothing of rhodos. I was to discover the learning curve is arduous, slow and expensive. Yet, if one plant could bring so much pleasure why not obtain a few others? Over the next two years we purchased four more rhodos and an azalea. Then, I reasoned, it would be easier and less expensive to propagate them rather than spend the then, (the 1970's), extravagant sum of \$5.00 each. It was kind of like cutting out the middle man. The first step on the learning curve is that when it comes to rhodos and azaleas "easy and cheap" are foreign concepts.

From the President

My neighbour, Bill Bisset, knew how to propagate plants. He should; he was the chief gardener for the Corporation of Burnaby. Designing gardens and landscaping them was part of his job description. He also spent much of his time supervising the Corporation's greenhouses near Burnaby Lake. Bill always had a wide variety of intriguing plants in his

home garden, plants not found in a typical retail nursery. His greenhouse, attached to his garage/workshop was brimming over with a cornucopia of goodies.

I asked Bill how to propagate plants, particularly rhodos and azaleas. He acknowledged a certain expertise in perennials and bedding plants but confessed a dearth of experience with rhodos. But it couldn't be too difficult could it? To get started we would need a cold frame; two actually, one for each of us. We used antiquated patio doors on the top. He thought this would be easier and cheaper to build than to construct a greenhouse. Besides, this was a tried and true method in the old country – Scotland. According to his instructions we filled them with coarse sand. Just sand. Bill said this was the propagation medium for some plants in the greenhouse. He failed to tell me which plants. Nor did he relate any information about temperature control. He assumed I had a modicum of common sense (which of course is neither common nor sensible.) I took three dozen cuttings from the six plants I had purchased: Lorna, Virgo, Bluebird, Lem's Monarch, Hotei, and Unique. The plants looked butchered, but after all I would soon have three dozen more plants in my landscape, right?

I placed my "propagation box" in the sun, with a southern exposure. I didn't ask Bill about this stroke of genius; I did not want the new cuttings to get chilled, and this frenzy of activity was taking place in early April. I then drenched the cuttings with a hose, tightly closed the top window and began to dream of my new rhodo garden with the bountiful bevy of colors soon to burst forth. What a nightmare. You know I couldn't make this up. Mistakes like this must be thoroughly planned.

All of this was in the days before dried flower arrangements were in vogue. I was definitely ahead of my time. Within 48 hours I had produced an entire cold frame of dried flowers, but all of one color—brown. My beloved cuttings had efficiently been cooked to death. Not one survivor. I don't do things by half measures. Bill Bisset thought it was hilarious but I was in mourning. I reminded him he forgot to tell me how things work in his state of the art greenhouse: automatic temperature control for heating and cooling, filtered sun, automatic mist systems, bottom heat in propagation boxes, grow lights, appropriate planting mediums, and propagation at the proper time in a plant's life cycle. I definitely needed more information. With a promise to Bill to share any progress with him my schooling began to take shape.

In 1978 I attended my first meeting of the American Rhododendron Society, Vancouver Chapter. The meetings were exhilarating. These people knew rhodos on a first name basis. Education of members was a priority. Expert speakers challenged us to recreate what we saw in the Himalayas, or China, or England, or Japan, in our own gardens. And, we were educated on how to go about the process. Companion plants were introduced to keep us balanced. Refreshments kept us nourished. Garden tours were arranged. Members cared for one another. Yet, all paled in the face of the ultimate: at a later meeting there was a workshop on propagation from cuttings. Could it be true? Can rhodos grow from cuttings? Do they stay green, not brown? I was in heaven. I could hardly wait to share this with Bill.

Bobby Ogdon



From the Editor

Last Month:

Last month, Chris Klapwijk presented a fine show of the many photos he had taken during the 2003 Spring Bus Tour to Seattle and Portland, allowing all of us who had participated in the trip to relive many of its fine sights, and those who were not able to go, a wonderful distillation of what we saw.

Chris has offered to make a CD of his presentation available to all those who would like to enjoy the pictures again. The CD contains almost 200 images, as well as a free PowerPoint player, for only \$25.00, of which \$5.00 will be donated to the club to be used towards the eventual purchase of our own digital projector. You can contact Chris by e-mail at chrisk@flounder.ca or by phone at 604-888-0920.



This Month:

This month we will be hearing from Terry Maczuga of Cloud Mountain Farm, a nursery which specializes in tree fruit and grape stock as well as native northwest flora and alpine species. You can view their extensive website at www.cloudmountainfarm.com. The nursery is located at the foot of the Sumas Mountain in Washington state, so they have extensive experience with the kind of growing conditions we have. This presentation will concentrate on dwarf conifers and their use in the landscape.

Notes:

One of the topics which has been much discussed during the past two Directors Meetings has been what should be done about increasing the audibility of the speakers' presentations. We have heard from various sources that they are frustrated by an inability to hear what the guest speaker is saying. Of course all the speakers do not have the same ability to project their voices, nor the same amount of experience in addressing groups and knowing how to position themselves effectively. Similarly, our members do not all have the same level of auditory acuity or, apparently, the confidence to sit up at the front of the hall if they do have some trouble hearing. It is all a puzzle.

We have looked into the rental or purchase of appropriate equipment, but costs are significant if not prohibitive. Rental of equipment would cost about \$80.00 a meeting, in addition to which someone would have to be responsible for the pickup and return of the equipment to the vendor before and after each meeting. The purchase of the equipment would cost between \$1400.00 and \$1900.00, depending on whether a lapel microphone was included. And again, would entail designating someone to be responsible for bringing in and taking home about 55lbs of equipment each meeting, since leaving such valuable material behind at the hall is probably not be advisable.

So there you have it. Currently we are feeling a little mired in the logistics and costs analyses. And to add to our confusion we are not really sure of how important an issue this is.

It would be very much appreciated if all members who have an opinion on the importance of this issue, or any ideas on any other steps which can be taken, would speak directly to Bobby Ogdon, or Colleen Forster, or Mike Bale.

More Quick Hits

- Joe Ronsley, the Program Chair at the Vancouver Rhododendron Society has written to extend an invitation to all rhododendron enthusiasts to attend the March VRS meeting at which Steve Hootman, co-Executive Director of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, will speak. Steve is an excellent speaker, and it is always fascinating to find out what both Steve and the Species Foundation have been up to lately. The meeting will be held as usual at the Floral Hall, Van Dusen Gardens (37th Ave. and Oak Street, Vancouver) and commences at 7:30 pm.
- PARS (Peace Arch Rhododendron Society) Show and Sale, Saturday, April 3rd, 9 am to 3 pm
Elgin Hall, 14250 Crescent Rd., (Crescent Rd. at 142A St.) Surrey
- FVRS (Fraser Valley Rhododendron Society) Show and Sale, Sunday April 25th, 11 am to 3 pm
Whonnock Lake Centre, 27871 113th Ave., Maple Ridge
- VRS (Vancouver Rhododendron Society) Show and Sale, Saturday, May 1st, 10 am, and Sunday May 2nd, 12 pm
UBC Botanical Garden, 6804 SW Marine Drive, Vancouver
- FSRS (Fraser South Rhododendron Society) Show and Sale, Saturday, May 15th, 10 am to 4 pm,
United Church (parking lot), 5673 - 200 Street, Langley



COMPANION PLANTS

K is for Koelreuteria,
of the Soapberry Family
Family: Sapindaceae, and

K is for Kirengeshoma
of the Hydrangea family
Family: Hydrangeaceae

Koelreuteria paniculata

For creating light dappled shade over rhododendrons in open areas, the Golden Rain Tree, or Pride of India, is a good choice. Not to be confused with the Golden Chain Tree (Laburnum) which blooms with long trailing racemes of yellow in late spring, this one is a late bloomer. The 12-inch panicles of small yellow flowers stand up above the foliage in August or so. The pinnate leaves are up to 18 inches long, emerging pinky-red in late spring and turning to butter yellow in fall. For good flower set, you need a good warm summer. Place in full sun with well drained soil – perhaps a bit of a rise in the border or open yard, with the rhodos lower down for the moisture. The blooms may turn to bladder-like pods, pinkish to brown, which are quite striking on their own, like little Chinese lanterns. Two similar species may be available, *K. bipinnata* or *K. paniculata*. Both develop to open spreading trees of 20 to 30 feet in time, but are not overly vigorous. They will grow from seed or root cuttings, and require little or no pruning once the tree is established and headed up to the height you wish. A fastigiate form has been selected which is excellent for smaller gardens, but it is rare as yet. There is also a later blooming form called ‘September Gold’, and it is well worth the search for this one since it adds texture and color at an important time in the garden.



Koelreuteria paniculata

This Golden Rain Tree is part of the Sapindaceae family, a huge family of over 150 diverse genera, amongst which are Maple trees - *Acer* spp, Horse Chestnut trees - *Aesculus* spp, and Lychee Nut trees - *Litchi* spp.

Kirengeshoma palmata

Yellow Wax Bells (*Kirengeshoma palmata*) is a perennial for the woodland border in moist acidic soil, and WOW! does it add punch to the fall garden. There's no way by looking at it that you'd think “hydrangea” though – pairs of fuzzy maple-like leaves on delicate black stems, topped by tubular soft yellow flowers, standing 2 to 4 feet tall. Nope – not a hydrangea. But it is! Never invasive, the clumps can grow to 30 inches across. The foliage dies away for winter, and the rhizomes can be divided in spring, being gentle with the fresh shoots. Control slugs and snails at this time also, as the sprouts are apparently quite delectable. Place out of winds to keep the stems from going over. The flowers last well when cut for the table. It won't be in every plant center, but specialty growers should have it.



Kirengeshoma palmata

The name for this plant is derived from the Japanese words “ki” - yellow, “rengeshoma” - lotus blossom, and “shoma” - hat. It was previously classified as part of the Saxifrage family.

Happy Planting,

Colleen Forster

Up the Garden Path with Norma Senn

Lilacs

March 2004

As a student, I was taught that garden plants should do at least two things to provide garden interest, and shrubs offering year round interest were to be used as much as possible. With this in mind, my plant identification professor tended to sneer at lilacs, saying they were nice in bloom, but didn't do much else for the garden. He was more or less right, since during the summer, they are what I describe as "green blobs in the landscape plants", and most have neither fall color nor any special fruit or winter interest. But, who cares? When they are in bloom, lilacs put on a great flower display, the fragrance is wonderful and where winter hardiness is an issue, there are excellent selections that can grow into Zone 2.

The most common species grown is *Syringa vulgaris*, the Common Lilac. There are many dozens of varieties available, with flowers that range in color from pure white through lavender blues, wine reds and dark purples, and there are single and double forms. Here are just a few recommended varieties: 'Belle de Nancy' (double pink), 'Victor Lemoine' (single lilac), 'Charles Joly' (double, dark purple), 'Ludwig Spaeth' (single, wine red), 'Madame Lemoine' (double white), 'President Lincoln' (single lavender blue). A recent cultivar introduction, 'Sensation', has a white picotee edge surrounding a wine red flower that provides



Syringa x laciniata, UBC Botanical Garden



a lovely two-tone effect. There are also some new Russian cultivars that are entering the North American market. They are reliably hardy and have a longer blooming period than some of the older varieties. Look for Russian sounding names like 'Krasavitsa Moskvyy' (Beauty of Moscow) and 'Nadezhda' (Nadia, or Hope).

While all cultivars of *S. vulgaris* have fragrance, some are definitely more fragrant than others. If you are buying a new plant, it's well worth sniffing the blooms to choose one with really good fragrance. Sprays of the Common Lilac make good cut flowers, but they are best cut early in the day when the plants are turgid. Since the stems are woody, it is helpful to crush the bottom two or three inches of woody stem with a hammer before arranging the flowers. They use a lot of water, so use a deep vase. The foliage is heart-shaped and a nice deep green.

In time, Common Lilacs are very large, deciduous shrubs, easily reaching 15 to 20 feet in height. They need regular pruning to keep them in bounds as they can become "thugs" because of their suckering habit. Personally, I prefer lilacs grown in a naturalistic style, but they can be pruned into formal shapes, and many people use them as large hedges or screens.

There are several other species of very hardy, large lilacs, such as *S. villosa*, Late Lilac, *S. x prestoniae*, Preston Lilac, *S. x henryi*, 'Lutece', and *S. josikaea*, Hungarian Lilac, all of which grow into Zone 2. Most of these are readily available from large garden centers and mail order catalogues that specialize in

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'Madame Lemoine'



'Sensation'



'Krasavitsa Moskvyy'

hardy plants for the Prairies. By planting several species, bloom time can be extended. The Preston Lilacs, *S. x prestoniae*, were originally developed in the 1920's by Isabelle Preston, the famous Canadian plant breeder. Others have continued her breeding work, and there are many nice varieties in this group.

For smaller gardens, three lovely small lilacs are available: Littleleaf Lilac, *S. microphylla*; Meyer's Lilac, *S. meyeri*; and the Korean Lilac, *S. pubescens ssp. patula* 'Miss Kim'. These are similar in size and habit, under five to six feet in height, and all have small, fine-textured, heart-shaped foliage. They are slow growing, so make good additions to most gardens, and are even amenable to rockeries. All have fragrant, soft lavender blue flowers.

Of these three small plants, the easiest one to find is 'Miss Kim'. It has the added features of having dark purple flower buds that open to a lighter blue, and in the fall the foliage develops a rich burgundy color. There seems to be some confusion in the trade as to the species listing for 'Miss Kim'. You may see it listed as *Syringa pubescens ssp. patula*, or as *Syringa patula*, but either way it is well worth having.

Another very pretty lilac is the Cut-Leaf Lilac, *S. laciniata*. As the name suggests, the foliage is finely cut and gives the plant a soft, delicate texture. It flowers slightly later than the Common Lilac, usually in the second week of June here in the lower Mainland. The only drawback to this plant is that the flowers are not strongly scented. However, the growth habit is well-behaved, and in time, it forms a dense, wide-spreading shrub that reaches a height of only about 6 feet. It is amenable to pruning to keep it a bit shorter. Lilacs don't usually have fall color, but *S. laciniata* may have some yellow and reds in the foliage in the fall.

The Japanese Tree Lilac, *S. reticulata*, is a good small tree suitable for most gardens. It is hardy to Zone 4. This is the last species of lilac to bloom, and it has large sprays of creamy white flowers in late June. In summer, the foliage is an attractive shade of bright green, and it has lovely bark that adds to the winter garden. Tree trunks have coppery red bark that is marked with prominent lenticels. The Japanese Tree Lilac can reach a height of about 30 feet, but is usually smaller. Unlike other lilacs that are multi-stemmed shrubs, this grows with just a single trunk.

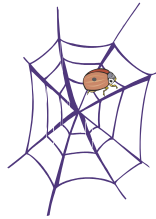
Lilacs need full sun for best growth and good flower display. Average garden soils are suitable, and while lilacs do tolerate acid soils, they prefer a near neutral pH. If you live in a region with acid soils, liming the soil at planting time and then applying lime regularly is recommended. However, while Lilacs benefit from some lime, they are not tolerant of high pH soils (greater than pH 8.) They need even soil moisture and good drainage.

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Lilacs can be purchased in the spring as bare root shrubs or as container grown plants. It may take three to four years for the plants to start to flower, so don't be too impatient. Once they are established, the larger, multi-stemmed species of lilacs need to be pruned regularly to keep them in bounds and promote flowering wood. Ideally, individual branches should be cut back as close to the ground as possible, immediately after flowering. Try to remove about one quarter of the shoots each year, always selecting the oldest shoots for removal. The oldest shoots will be dark, heavy and thick. This is the practice of renewal pruning, and it is recommended for many of our large, multi-stemmed shrubs.



Syringa microphylla



Websites for Lilacs:

www.raw-connections.com/garden/shrubs/lilacsel.htm

This is actually part of a gardening site designed primarily for children, but it has a nicely laid out listing of many of the available cultivars, with their colours and characteristics.

www.raw-connections.com/garden/shrubs/prunlila.htm

The same site has a related page on pruning, which to a novice lilac grower like me seemed exceptionally sensible.

www.hort.uconn.edu/plants/a/a.html

The University of Connecticut has a great horticultural site with many useful features, including an alphabetical browse (by either Latin or common name) which includes a number of entries for various *Syringa* species and cultivars.



Syringa meyeri

What's in Bloom?

The following is a selection from the images and information which Chris Klapwijk has posted on our website. Our website, at www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth continues to expand and improve. It is a great resource, and a wonderful service which Chris has provided. All images and information have been provided by Chris.



R. moupinense
epithet: from Moupin, China **type:** lepidote
size: to 1.5m / 5' **bloom period:** Feb-Mar
hardiness: -15° C / 5° F
at RSF / 28Feb2004



R. ramsdenianum
epithet: after Sir J. Ramsden **type:** elepidote
size: to 12m / 40' **bloom period:** Feb-Mar
hardiness: -15° C / 5° F
at RSF / 28Feb2004



R. eclecticum
epithet: picked out **type:** elepidote
size: to 3m / 10' **bloom period:** Feb-Mar
hardiness: -15° C / 5° F
at RSF / 28Feb2004



R. seingkuense
epithet: from the Seingku Valley, Burma **type:** lepidote
size: to 1m / 3' **bloom period:** Feb-Mar
hardiness: -15° C / 5° F
at RSF / 28Feb2004



***Helleborus* hybrid**
size: to 0.5m / 1' **bloom period:** Dec-Mar
hardiness: -20° C / -4° F
used to be called *Helleborus orientalis*



***Viburnum* 'Bodnantense'**
size: to 4m / 13' **bloom period:** Nov-Mar
hardiness: -20° C / -4° F **fragrant flowers**
hybrid between *V. farreri* and *V. grandiflorum*